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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000131

SIPDIS
STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, AF/PDPA, DRL, INR/AA
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/26
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: JOS STATUS: TWO WEEKS LATER

REF: ABUJA 0103 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: James P. McNulty, Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy
Abuja, Political Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Jos and surrounding towns now exhibit a tense quiet in the wake of the widespread violence that erupted there two weeks ago. Use of cellular telephones and text messaging, which reportedly contributed to the rapid spread of violence, continue to keep tensions elevated as rival groups called for revenge. Officials report over 300 lives lost, but many religious and civil society groups say that hundreds more are missing. A Nigerian Red Cross official estimates that 10,000 displaced persons remain at 12 camps. Military and Police forces maintain a visible presence.
END SUMMARY.

SOCIAL NETWORKING INFLAMES RHETORIC ON BOTH SIDES

2. (C) Jos residents circulated text messages in recent days blaming certain groups for the violence or calling for revenge, according to a USAID implementing partner in Jos who told USAID Officer January 29 of numerous messages passed along by friends and colleagues, with the content depending on the religious affiliation of the sender. A text message circulating in Muslim circles, for example, called upon recipients to sign an on-line petition calling for the impeachment of Plateau State Governor Jonas Jang, a Christian. Similarly, a Christian told USAID Officer of messages circulating in Christian circles about sophisticated weapons used by Muslims in Jos. He commented that, as a result, recipients would think that "Muslims have become the Nigerian Army itself." He lamented that "our people are desperately afraid of what they imagine the Hausas are planning still."

3. (SBU) The press and contacts reported that use of cellular telephones during the crisis may have contributed to the rapid

spread of the violence to different neighborhoods. Attacks in neighborhoods in one sector of town reportedly generated messages to relatives and friends in other sectors calling for revenge. Many of the messages contained inflamed, emotion-charged accounts, which led to further escalation of the violence.

14. (C) Press accounts varied widely on what incident or incidents may have provoked the initial violence. Initially, the press reported that a Muslim resident had attempted to rebuild his house, destroyed during the November 2008 riots, in a community that had since become predominantly Christian. Some accounts indicated that Christian youth threw stones at workers transporting building materials to the house undergoing renovation and later attacked a Muslim motorcycle rider who arrived upon the scene badly injured. Other accounts claimed the renovation work encroached on the property of a Christian neighbor or even that the Muslim homeowner had imported weapons and killed three neighbors during the November 2008 riots. Still another account insisted that the renovation work had disturbed religious services at a nearby church, leading some in the congregation to ask that the homeowner delay construction until services ended. Yet other versions claimed that Muslim youth attacked Christians as they left Sunday services or even trapped them in a burning church. (COMMENT: The exact cause may never become known, but the violence spread much more quickly and broadly than in the November 2008 riots, leading some to speculate that at least one group had stockpiled weapons and waited for an excuse to attack rivals. END COMMENT.)

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RESIDENTS FLEE TO BAUCHI

15. (C) Displaced Jos residents sought refuge in neighboring Bauchi State. According to a February 1 Nigerian Red Cross report, 6,500 internally displaced men, women, and children are sheltered at four camps along the highway between Jos and Bauchi. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has scrambled to provide food and sanitation to try to avoid the outbreak of diseases caused by unsanitary conditions. A Nigerian Red Cross official confirmed to PolOff February 1 that 10,000 displaced persons remained at eight camps in Jos, two in Panshin, and two in Mangu. The people are in fragile conditions, needing food, water, and medical supplies that NEMA, civil society, and religious groups are struggling to deliver. The Nigerian Red Cross spokesman confided to PolOff that people remain in fear of returning to their homes, even with the presence of police and military patrols, as they fear more violence in the name of revenge.

SANDERS